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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (07/13): "National Unity Should Trump Personal Interests"

Main Stories:

Al-Quds and Al-Ayyam lead with news of the arrival of Romanian President Tiran Basisko on July 12 in Ramallah for the signing of an agreement between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Romania. In a joint press conference, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud Abbas stated that Israel must accept the two-state solution and the complete cessation of settlement activities in order to resume negotiations with the Palestinians. Abbas stated that Romania can play a vital role in solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and President Basisko pledged his country's continued support of the PA and the efforts to revive negotiations.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida runs front page coverage of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's invitation to the Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas to meet and discuss the mechanisms for achieving a "political and economic peace" between the PA and Israel. Netanyahu is reported as stating that Israel has no reason not to meet with Abbas; furthermore, the core of the conflict is the failure of Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish state.

In a political cartoon related to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's invitation to President Abbas (Al-Quds), Netanyahu is depicted underground in an unlit room in Beer Sheeva, seated at a table across from an empty chair, presumably awaiting Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas. The cartoon, entitled "Beer Sheeva Negotiations!!" is an ironic comment on Netanyahu's desired location for negotiations with Abbas, implying that this is not a conducive environment for serious talks.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports on statements made by the EU's High

Representative for Foreign Affairs, Javier Solana, in London on July 11, in which he called on the UN Security Council to set a deadline by which a Palestinian State should be accepted as a full member of the UN, even if the Palestinians and Israelis do not reach an agreement. The paper also reports that a senior aide to President Abbas, Nimer Hammad, welcomed Solana's statements and noted that the international community is committed to ending the Palestinian conflict.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports on Voice of Palestine's July 12 interview with the PLO's Chief Negotiator, Saeb Erekat, in which he stated that the Palestinians will reject any US-Israeli agreement that would allow Israel to continue even limited settlement construction in the West Bank. Al-Ayyam also reports comments by Erekat that US Special Envoy George Mitchell will begin a "new mission" in the region in ten days.

Al-Quds reports on President Obama's July 12 interview with London-based Sky News, in which he expressed concern over Syria's policy towards its regional neighbors, and specifically, its support for Iran, Hamas, and Hizbullah. Obama stressed, though, that the US is committed to improving its relations with Syria, according to the report.

All dailies report on Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's appointment of Dr. Ghassan Al-Khatib as Director of the new Information Office for the Palestinian Authority (PA), reporting to the Prime Minister. Dr. Al-Khatib is a former Minister of Planning.

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Weekend Stories:

Sunday July 12

Al Quds, Al Ayyam, and Al Hayat Al Jadida report on claims that the U.S. has given Israel six months to respond to its demand of a complete freezing settlement construction freeze in the West Bank. These reports are based on statements made by France's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bernard Kouchner. Kouchner had completed an official visit to Beirut, during which he informed his Lebanese counterparts that the U.S. had extended its deadline despite the fact that the U.S. will not sponsor the resumption of negotiations as long as settlement construction continues.

Al Quds's front-page coverage includes the announcement by President Mahmud Abbas of his acceptance of any Egyptian proposal to achieve national reconciliation and to end the "siege" imposed upon the Gaza Strip. Both Fatah and Hamas have expressed their support for Egypt's involvement in the national unity talks. The paper also reports that the head of the Egyptian security delegation, Mohammad Ibrahim, is ready to submit a detailed report to Minister Omar Suleiman regarding his discussions with President Abbas and leaders of other Palestinian factions, with his recommendations on how to end the internal political conflict. President Abbas is quoted as stating: "Egypt is the only country that knows how to manage the Arab-Israeli conflict." President Abbas also stated that he believes Hamas leader Khaled Misha'al is moving towards a moderate position, and that his most recent speech was more moderate in its tone. Abbas also added that Hamas does not reject peace.

Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida both report on statements made by Ambassador Hisham Yousef, director of the Arab League Secretary General's office, that East Jerusalem is part of the territories of the Palestinian state. Yousef commented on the efforts by Israel regarding the "so-called Holy Basin," which he described as a means of controlling the surroundings of the old City of Jerusalem and as "absolutely illegal."

Saturday July 11

Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida report on statements made by leaders of the G8 Summit reiterating their full support for an end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on the two-state solution. The G8 called for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the

Palestinians, as well as the immediate opening of border crossings into Gaza in a manner that does not jeopardize the security of Israel.

Al Quds, Al Ayyam, and Al Hayat Al Jadida report on anti-Wall protests organized in Ramallah and Bethlehem, which coincided with the fifth anniversary of the International Court of Justice's ruling on the illegitimacy of the Wall. Israeli soldiers were called in to use force against protesters. The protests resulted in a number of arrests and injuries.

Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida report that according to the Israeli newspaper Yediot Ahranot, President Obama will convene a meeting with Jewish community leaders in the U.S. during which he will request their assistance in reaching out to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The newspaper also added that well-informed sources linked to the White House and Congress have described recent events between the White House and Netanyahu as a "crisis" and a "fire" which if not put out will negatively impact what remains of the special relationship between Israel and the U.S.

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BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Samih Shabib, Al-Ayyam, "Settlements and the US Position" (07/13): "The Palestinians still want to see a stronger stance from the U.S. and European countries regarding the settlements... Israel continues to work at high-speed to construct more settlements irregardless of the demands of the U.S. and the Europeans. There is no serious pressure exerted on Israel... Should we expect that the U.S. will take serious steps in the near future that will impact the expansion of settlements?"

2) Ghazi Hamad, Al-Quds independent daily, "How can we achieve a real victory over Israel?" (07/13): "How can we achieve victory over Israel under the current conflict? Victory will never be achieved given the current internal political division. National unity should trump personal interests."

WALLES